

## CLAIMS

I/We claim:

1. A method in a computing system for defining a group of users among those browsing a subject web site, the subject web site being comprised of pages, at least a portion of the pages containing text, comprising:

compiling a first index that, for each of a plurality of natural language words, identifies the pages whose text contains the word;

compiling a second index that, for each of a plurality of pages of the subject web site, identifies the users that have recently requested the page;

providing a visual user interface containing a control for receiving a query string;

receiving a query string via the control;

using the first index to identify pages that satisfy the received query string;

using the second index to identify users that recently accessed at least a threshold number of the identified pages;

displaying within the visual user interface, in conjunction with the control, information characterizing the users identified; and

storing a list of the users identified.

2. A method in a computing system for defining a group of people, comprising:

providing a visual user interface containing a control for receiving a query string;

receiving a query string via the control;

using an index on a body of documents to identify documents of the body that satisfy the received query string;

accessing a record indicating which documents of the body were accessed by each of a population of people during a foregoing time period to

identify people among the population that accessed at least a threshold number of the identified documents during the foregoing time period; and

displaying within the visual user interface, in conjunction with the control, information characterizing the people identified.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein the displaying step is performed within 30 seconds of the receiving step.

4. The method of claim 2, further comprising:  
receiving a modified query string via the control; and  
repeating the two identifying acts and the displaying act with respect to the received modified query string.

5. The method of claim 2 wherein the body of documents is a set of web pages available at a subject web site.

6. The method of claim 5, further comprising building the index based on the textual content of the web pages of the set.

7. The method of claim 2 wherein the threshold number is a constant.

8. The method of claim 2 wherein the threshold number is a predetermined percentage of the number of identified documents.

9. A computer-readable medium whose contents cause a computing system to define a group of people by:

providing a visual user interface containing a control for receiving a query string;

receiving a query string via the control;

using an index on a body of documents to identify documents of the body that satisfy the received query string;

accessing a record indicating which documents of the body were accessed by each of a population of people during a foregoing time period to identify people among the population that accessed at least a threshold number of the identified documents during the foregoing time period; and

displaying within the visual user interface, in conjunction with the control, information characterizing the people identified.

10. One or more computer memories collectively containing a user segmentation data structure, comprising:

a document word index identifying, for each of a plurality of natural language words, the documents among a plurality of documents containing the word; and

a document reading history identifying, for each of the plurality of documents, users that read the document during a period of time, such that, for one or more selected words, the document word index may be used to identify the documents of the plurality that contain the selected words, and such that the document reading history may be used to identify users among the plurality that have read at least a portion of the identified documents.

11. A method in a computing system for receiving a definition of a segment of users among those browsing a subject web site, the subject web site being comprised of pages, at least a portion of the pages containing text, comprising:

providing a visual user interface containing a control for receiving a query string; and

receiving a query string via the control for use in defining a segment, the query string specifying words whose appearance among the pages of the web site visited by a particular user selects the user for the defined segment.

12. The method of claim 11 wherein the query string contains only keywords that are contained by web pages matching the query string.

13. The method of claim 11 wherein the query string contains only keywords that are contained by web pages matching the query string and attributes that are possessed by advertising prospects satisfying the query string.

14. The method of claim 11 wherein the query string contains both keywords are contained by at least some of web pages matching the query string and boolean operators that modify the keywords.

15. The method of claim 11 wherein the query string does not conform to the syntax requirements for an SQL database query.

16. A computer-readable medium whose contents cause a computing system to receive a definition of a segment of users among those browsing a subject web site, the subject web site being comprised of pages, at least a portion of the pages containing text, by:

providing a visual user interface containing a control for receiving a query string; and

receiving a query string via the control for use in defining a segment, the query string specifying words whose appearance among the pages of the web site visited by a particular user selects the user for the defined segment.

17. One or more computer memories collectively containing a data structure defining a segment of computer users among computer users visiting web pages among a group of web pages, the data structure comprising a set of words whose appearance among the web pages visited by a particular computer user selects the computer user for the segment.

18. A method in a computing system for visualizing a segment of advertising prospects, comprising:

displaying the size of a segment of advertising prospects generated based upon a string of natural language keywords; and

displaying information characterizing the advertising prospects that make up the generated segment.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein the displayed information includes statistical measures across the advertising prospects of the generated segment.

20. The method of claim 18 wherein the displayed information includes attributes that commonly occur among the advertising prospects of the generated segment.

21. The method of claim 18 wherein the advertising prospects of the generated segment have attributes, and wherein the displayed information includes attributes that tend to distinguish the advertising prospects of the generated segment from the balance of a population within which the generated segment is defined.

22. The method of claim 18 wherein the advertising prospects of the generated segment have attributes, and wherein the advertising prospects are ranked within the segment, and wherein the displayed information includes at least a subset of the attributes of one or more of the highest-ranked advertising prospects of the segment.

23. The method of claim 18 wherein the advertising prospects of the generated segment have attributes, and wherein the advertising prospects are

ranked within the segment, and wherein the displayed information includes at least a subset of the attributes of one or more of the lowest-ranked advertising prospects of the segment.

24. A computing system for visualizing a segment of advertising prospects, comprising:

a segment size display subsystem that displays the size of a segment of advertising prospects generated based upon a string of natural language keywords; and

a segment characterization display subsystem that displays information characterizing the advertising prospects that make up the generated segment.

25. One or more computer memories collectively containing a segment characterization data structure, comprising:

an indication of the size of a segment of advertising prospects generated based upon a string of natural language keywords; and

information characterizing the advertising prospects that make up the generated segment.

26. A method in a computing system for defining a group of people, comprising:

receiving a query string;

identifying documents among a body of documents that satisfy the received query string;

identifying people among a population of people that accessed at least a threshold number of the identified documents during a foregoing time period; and

outputting information characterizing the people identified.

27. The method of claim 26, further comprising, in response to additional user input, persistently storing a segment definition predicated on the received query string.

28. The method of claim 26, further comprising, in response to additional user input, outputting a list of the identified users.

29. The method of claim 26 wherein the query string is received via a visual user interface.

30. The method of claim 26 wherein the query string is received as an electronic message.

31. The method of claim 26 wherein the information characterizing the people identified is outputted by being displayed.

32. The method of claim 26 wherein the information characterizing the people identified is outputted by being stored.

33. The method of claim 26 wherein the information characterizing the people identified is outputted by being printed.

34. The method of claim 26 wherein the information characterizing the people identified is outputted by being electronically transmitted.

35. One or more computer memories collectively containing a user segment definition data structure, the data structure specifying a query against documents in a collection of documents whose access by users is tracked

that may be used to identify a group of users with which to populate a segment defined by the segment definition.

36. A method in a computing system for defining a group of people, comprising:

receiving a query string;

identifying documents among a body of documents that satisfy the received query string, the body of documents being divided into a number of preexisting document groups;

ranking the document groups based upon the number of identified documents contained by each document group;

displaying a portion of the highest-ranked document groups;

receiving user input specifying at least one of the selected document groups; and

identifying any person who has accessed at least a threshold number of documents in any of the specified document groups.

37. A method in a computing system for defining a group of people, comprising:

receiving a query string;

among a body of objects, each object (a) having text associated with it, and (b) being subject to being interacted with by people, identifying objects such that the text associated with each identified object satisfies the query string;

identifying people among a population of people that have performed at least a threshold level of interaction with the identified objects during a foregoing time period; and

outputting information characterizing the people identified.

38. The method of claim 37 wherein each object is a document, and people are identified who have read the identified objects.

39. The method of claim 37 wherein each object is a product, and wherein people are identified who have purchased identified products.

40. The method of claim 37 wherein each object is a product, and wherein people are identified who have rated identified products.

41. The method of claim 37 wherein each object is a song having lyrics, and wherein songs are identified whose lyrics satisfy the received query, and wherein people are identified who have listened to identified songs.

42. The method of claim 37 wherein it is possible to establish links from a source object to a destination object, the method further comprising identifying one or more additional objects, each identified additional object being a source object for a link having an identified object as its destination object, and wherein people are identified that have performed at least a threshold-level of interaction with a group of objects including both the identified objects and the additional identified objects during the foregoing time period.

43. The method of claim 37 wherein it is possible to establish links from a source object to a destination object, the method further comprising identifying one or more additional objects, each identified additional object being a destination object for a link having an identified object as its source object, and wherein people are identified that have performed at least a threshold-level of interaction with a group of objects including both the identified objects and the additional identified objects during the foregoing time period.